

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 8, 2017

The Honorable John F. Kelly
Secretary of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Kelly,

We write as Democratic Members of Congress to express our deep concerns and opposition to an immigration enforcement proposal you discussed in a recent media interview where you outlined a plan to separate families and put children into the U.S. foster care system.

Specifically, in an interview with CNN's Wolf Blitzer on Monday, you stated that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is considering separating immigrant children from their parents as a way to deter immigrants from unlawful entry into the United States. Blitzer pointedly asked you: "If you get some young kids who manage to sneak into the United States with their parents, are Department of Homeland Security personnel going to separate the children from their moms and dads?" You replied: "Yes, I am considering, in order to deter more movement along this terribly dangerous network, I am considering exactly that." You then went on to say that the Department would "turn them over to HHS, and they do a very, very good job of either putting them in kind of foster care or linking them up with parents or family members in the United States."

As Members of Congress dedicated to working to improve the state of child welfare in America, this raises, not only serious ethical and humanitarian questions, but also concerns about overwhelming an already overburdened, underfunded and struggling system. In addition, it is seriously troubling that parents could be prosecuted for human trafficking if they facilitate the unlawful entry of their minor children into the United States, as outlined in the recent DHS enforcement memorandum.

The utilization of unsound policy that calls for the separation of parents and children when they are detained as a deterrent to illegal immigration unwittingly conveys the department's clear lack of understanding of the child welfare system. The entire purpose of the child welfare system, specifically the use of foster care, is to *protect* children from abuse and neglect – not as a tool for punishing or criminalizing parents. Moreover, history plainly demonstrates that DHS is ill-equipped to care for children, let alone the special needs of vulnerable immigrant children.

We ask that you reconsider the implementation of this harmful immigration policy which will only serve to further traumatize families, overwhelm our child welfare system and roll back years of humanitarian progress. We also ask that you avoid pursuing an immigration policy intended to punish parents and criminalize vulnerable families seeking refuge in the United States. Our nation's principles of humanity rooted in the preservation and protection of family units demands no less.

Sincerely,

Members of Congress